

Total AC
Burned - 23,000 ^{Approx}

Havre

DAILY NEWS

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Sivertsen holds second East Fork Fire meeting

County meeting set for Monday

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Retired rancher and former state legislator Bob Sivertsen said Monday after a meeting with ranchers, Rocky Boy and Bureau of Indian Affairs officials at Northern Winz Casino that difficulties in battling the East Fork Fire had to do with Montana Department of Natural Resources policy and not a lack of resources and the overwhelming scope of the fire, as a fire supervisor said.

He said though communications was an issue, ranchers and volunteers had the means to contain the fire to the reservation but weren't allowed to do so.

County have arranged an after action review about the fire Monday at 7 p.m. in the Chinook Fire Station at 1201 Illinois Street.

Monday, Sivertsen said he has talked with ranchers who battled the blaze that consumed 21,896 acres in Blaine and Hill County, and they share the opinion that DNRC policy is a problem..

He added that Wednesday, Sept 30, ranchers wanted in "the worst way" to use bulldozers to create fire lines and set a backfire when the flames were in an area filled with timber, but they were prevented from doing so by the DNRC.

During the meeting, Mamie

Stump of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs said the tribe should enter into memorandums of understanding with property owners adjacent to the reservation, so they know if they can go on an owners' private property to create fire lines. Stump said the BIA was told by a couple of property owners not to take such action.

Sivertsen said he would meet with DNRC officials Thursday in Helena and he thinks most of the issues can be solved either administratively or legislatively.

Sivertsen and Theron Oats, fire management officer for Rocky Boy Forestry, both said that communications was an

been able to go ahead and do what the ranchers had wanted to do, we could have resolved this."

In an interview Sept 15, East Fork Fire Incident Commander Don Pyrah of DNRC said it was not policy, but the overwhelming nature of the fire, a lack of available resources including communications resources and complex terrain that effected the response.

The fire started near East Fork Reservoir on Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation Aug. 27. It had grown to more than 20,000 acres within four days, leading to a top-level federal incident command team taking over for about a week before it was returned to control of the DNRC and eventually the local governments.

This is the second meeting Sivertsen has arranged as a private citizen to talk about problems people said they saw in fighting the fire.

issue that needs to be improved upon.

Oats said he was not able to keep in contact with Bear Paw Volunteer Fire Department and could not find their frequency. He tried on a statewide radio frequency used for public emergencies, and still wasn't able to maintain contact with Bear Paw.

Sivertsen said maybe ranchers should receive some training in fire fighting. He said, from his conversations, ranchers would not be willing to go for a certification but he thinks they would be receptive to doing some training.

Oats said that when the fire went off the reservation the

day it started, he had no jurisdiction to fight it outside the reservation borders.

Sivertsen said law enforcement largely did a good job, but some officers could probably use some additional training in how to better handle people in distress such as people who were blocked from returning to property that was in areas affected by the fire and access was closed off.

Sivertsen said he will meet with Pyrah next Monday at 4 p.m. in the Timmons Room in the Hill County Courthouse.

Sivertsen said he will then decide whether to hold another public meeting.